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## **SCHOOL COMMUNITY CRISIS TEAM**

### **Stephen Decatur Elementary and High School**

#### **Sigonella, Italy**

The Crisis Intervention Team at Stephen Decatur School brings together school and community mental health professionals. The school members include the school psychologist, the three school counselors, the teacher of emotionally impaired students, and an assistant principal. Other members are mental health or counseling representatives from Educational and Developmental Intervention Services (E.D.I.S.), the Naval Hospital, Navy Family Services, and the chapel. The interdisciplinary nature of the team allows professionals to pool their expertise to meet a variety of needs. The number of trained persons in this area allows the committee to effectively address the needs of students, staff, and parents in a variety of situations.

The Naval Hospital Mental Health Department provides annual training. Regular meetings of the committee allow members to develop interpersonal relationships, discuss various methods of dealing with crises, and plan prevention and intervention strategies. It also ensures that a process is in place and that members are ready to respond at a moment's notice to any emergency. The community has been supportive in encouraging their representatives to participate in this team. As a result, the Crisis Intervention Team needs no additional funds with which to operate.

The Crisis Intervention Team is a part of every Department of Defense Dependent School (DoDDS). This particular team evolved as a school/community partnership when a death occurred that had a profound effect on the entire faculty and staff. Outside help was a necessity in helping the staff deal with the death of a recent graduate of Stephen Decatur, whose father was a school counselor. This was followed shortly by the deaths of spouses of two faculty members, one of who was well known to the students, as well as the staff members. Through these traumas the importance of the community support became more evident.

With the number of persons on the committee, it is possible to organize so that immediate services can be provided to individual and groups of students, individual and groups of staff members, and to parents. An informal debriefing is held after every crisis involving the team. During that time, changes are made in the overall plan as needed.

Added to the notification process this year is a procedure through which the hospital can inform school counselors and/or administration of medical crises involving students, e.g. attempted suicides, etc. Care is taken to limit this notification to persons with a 'need to know' so that the privacy of the family is respected, while still allowing the school to provide services when appropriate. Last year the school also began taking a proactive role in identifying students at risk and working with families to provide counseling/intervention services before a crisis arises. This was done through grade checks, parent, teacher, and administrative referrals, based on discipline and tardy and attendance information.

The strength of this committee was to put to the test last year when a third grade child was murdered. This situation had a profound impact upon the entire community. The close association of the school personnel with this situation would have made it extremely difficult to handle effectively without the support and involvement of the community members of the Crisis Intervention Team. Because of the careful groundwork done by the team, members were able to provide immediate support and assistance to the school, students and staff.

Although this school seems to have had a number of extremely serious and traumatic crises in the last few years, any of these things could have happened in any location. The involvement and support of the community provides not only assistance, but also a lifeline to the school's crisis team members who must deal with their own reactions, as well as those of the staff and students.

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